

NEWS RELEASE

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DeNUCCI SAYS STAFFING SHORTAGE SNAGS AMBULANCE INSPECTIONS

State Auditor Joe DeNucci said today that the state's ambulance inspection program is in danger of becoming meaningless and ineffective due to a staffing shortage at the state's Office of Emergency Medical Services (OEMS).

"This audit shows that there is a serious public health and safety problem that must be addressed by devoting more oversight and resources to OEMS for timely ambulance inspections," DeNucci said.

In the audit, DeNucci found that 74 percent of the state's ambulance service providers were not inspected before their current licenses expired and that 37 percent were still operating with expired licenses at the time of the audit. In some cases, licenses were expired for nine months before new reviews were conducted.

DeNucci said the agency has only three inspectors to perform reviews, which average about four hours per vehicle. In the past, the agency has had as many as five inspectors to handle these duties. This staffing shortage has often resulted in only cursory inspections, with large providers having their overall reviews based on only a few ambulance inspections.

DeNucci noted that, during the audit, members of his staff accompanied OEMS inspectors and found that they did a good job under difficult conditions, uncovering a wide variety of deficiencies, including inadequate, contaminated or missing medical equipment, expired medication and poorly maintained vehicles. These reviews resulted in three ambulances, including one that just finished an emergency run, being removed from the roads.

According to DeNucci's audit, the shortage of inspectors also made it difficult to do follow-up reviews to determine if deficiencies had been corrected. DeNucci said some providers indicated corrective action had been taken when no repairs had actually been made, a violation of state regulations that calls for either a fine or a license suspension.

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Inspectors could not remember any ambulance provider being fined and were unable to document that any had ever been suspended.

DeNucci said the Department of Public Health, the parent agency of OEMS, must provide the agency with sufficient staffing to carry out an effective inspection and licensing program.

“Emergency services provide vital life-saving treatment and must have the full confidence of the public,” DeNucci said. “Without adequate support, the Office of Emergency Medical Services cannot provide the kind of oversight that is needed to ensure that ambulance services are operating safely and efficiently.”

DeNucci also said the state should make sure that providers who fail inspections and who do not implement corrective action are given appropriate fines or suspensions, in accordance with state regulations.

The Department of Public Health replied that it agreed with Auditor DeNucci’s assessment that the allocation of additional resources would help to alleviate the problem.

In other areas, DeNucci’s audit revealed that OEMS has done an inadequate job of monitoring its vendor and consultant contracts. For example, the agency’s contract with its medical director was amended regularly to provide additional hours and funding. The medical director was also reimbursed for travel to out-of-state conferences that included more than \$1,400 for such unallowable expenses as excessive hotel stays, meal allowances for the extra days, rental car charges and membership dues to attend the meetings.

DeNucci’s report noted that an OEMS state employee who attended two of the same conferences as the consultant incurred none of those expenses and received \$826 less in reimbursements than the consultant.

“OEMS should stop paying for consultants to attend conferences, attempt to recoup the unallowable expenses uncovered by the audit and do a better job of monitoring its consultant contracts,” recommended DeNucci.

The Office of Emergency Medical Services is responsible for overseeing approximately 287 ambulance providers and 1, 250 vehicles.

